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McLean county

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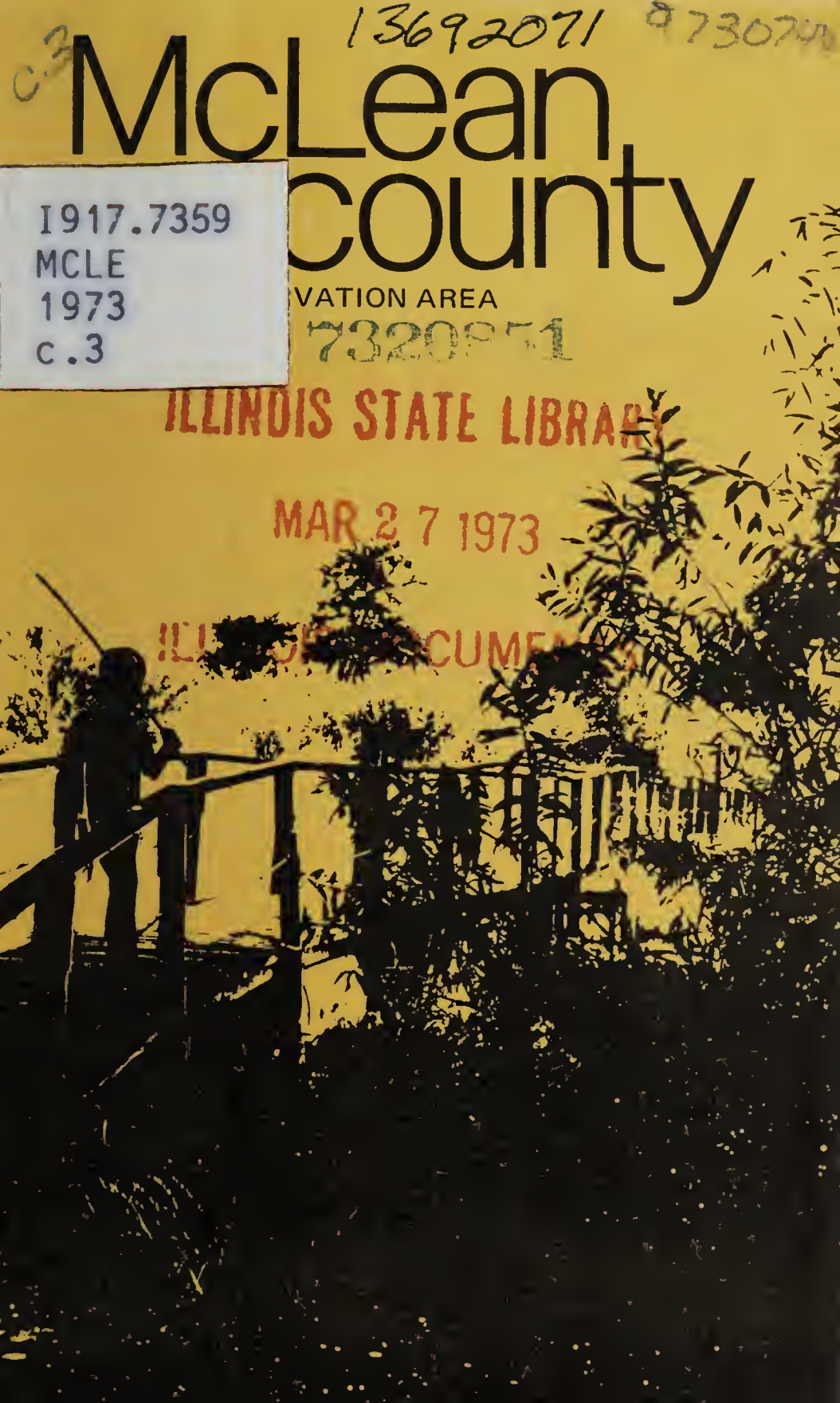

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THE PARK

McLean County Conservation Area provides the setting a conservation area needs, yet includes recreational facilities found in the state parks. The rolling terrain surrounding the lake, interspersed with clusters of timberland, is the second highest point in the county. The park is accessible from U.S. 150 or I-74 to Le Roy, then north on the Le Roy-Lexington blacktop for 5 miles, or 17 miles east of Bloomington on Route 9.

The State of Illinois originally purchased 760 acres in Dawson Township in 1959 but recent acquisitions have increased the acreage to 1616.

THE LAKE

McLean County Conservation Area lake is located in the general area of Illinois that is devoid of good lake sites, due to the topography and terrain of a very rich agricultural area. Preliminary surveys for the lake were made in August, 1957. Clearing contracts were awarded in September, 1960, and dam construction began in July, 1962, on the tributary North Fork of Salt Creek between U.S. 150 and Ill. 9.

Dawson Lake, the name given locally to the McLean County Conservation Area lake possibly because it is in Dawson Township or because the Dawson families were early settlers in this area, was opened for fishing in 1963. The 158-acre lake has a maximum depth of 27 feet with more than 5 miles of shoreline.

HISTORY

Indians: When early settlers arrived, they found the Kickapoo and Potowatomi Indian tribes in control of the country. According to the early histories, there was an Indian trail in the area which was the dividing line between the two tribes. After the boundary line was established, the Potawatomi retired to the vicinity of Fox River, while the Kickapoo tribe established their headquarters on Salt Creek, near where the town of Le Roy now stands, known to the first settlers as "Old Town Timber." The Potawatomi would come up as far as Rook's Creek on their hunting excursions and they frequently camped on the Vermilion River, but the boundary line was respected and the two tribes remained on friendly terms.

On July 30, 1819, the Kickapoo tribe signed a treaty with the white men after the War of 1812. This treaty enabled the Indians to live on the land and take game until white settlers moved in. In 1830 there were 630 Kickapoo Indians living in the area. Then, in 1832 an order came for the Indians to move to Kansas where they were placed on a reservation.

General Terrain: The country as first seen by the early pioneers consisted of gentle rolling prairies with scattered groves of timber chiefly along the streams. These groves were abundant with white oak, red oak, maple, hickory, black walnut, ash, elm, butternut, buckeye, sassafras and a variety of similar timber. These new inhabitants sought the groves for shelter from bleak cold winds of winter and also for fuel, water and shade.

Much of the prairie land was wet and marshy, especially where the surface was only slightly rolling or nearly level. Timberland was considered more desirable than the prairie, as the tough prairie sod was difficult to turn with the primitive implements then in use. The prairie land was drained, however, as farms became more prevalent.

FACILITIES

Picnicking: Eight picnic areas are in shaded spots, with many picnic tables and fireplaces provided. No cooking may be done except on park or camp stoves. Parking lots are conveniently located all over the area.

Trails: The one-mile Tanglewood Self-Guiding Nature Trail winds around a lake finger in the wooded area. About midway is a beaver dam and a beaver house.

Fishing and Boating: The lake is stocked with largemouth bass, bluegill, sunfish, bullhead and channel cat. A boat launch and docks are present for private or rental boats. 10 HP motors or less are allowed, as well as sailboats.

Hunting: 1,300 acres are available for public hunting in season. Consult the park ranger for information concerning shooting time and opening dates for various game.

Winter Sports: Ice fishing and ice-skating are allowed if the ice is thick enough.

Concession Stand: The stand is near the lake and is open every day throughout the summer. Drinking water is available nearby.

Bridle Paths: Over seven miles of bridle paths wind through the park. Horses are not provided.

Camping: A large family camping area has gravel pads, electricity and a sanitary station for trailers. This campground has its own boat launch and docks. A second camping area is for horseback riders only, complete with hitching racks. There are two more areas used for youth group camping. Contact the park ranger for camping permits.

Please: The park is for all to enjoy so help keep it clean. All pets must be on a 10-foot leash or less. Swimming is not permitted. The park closes at 9 p.m.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION . . .

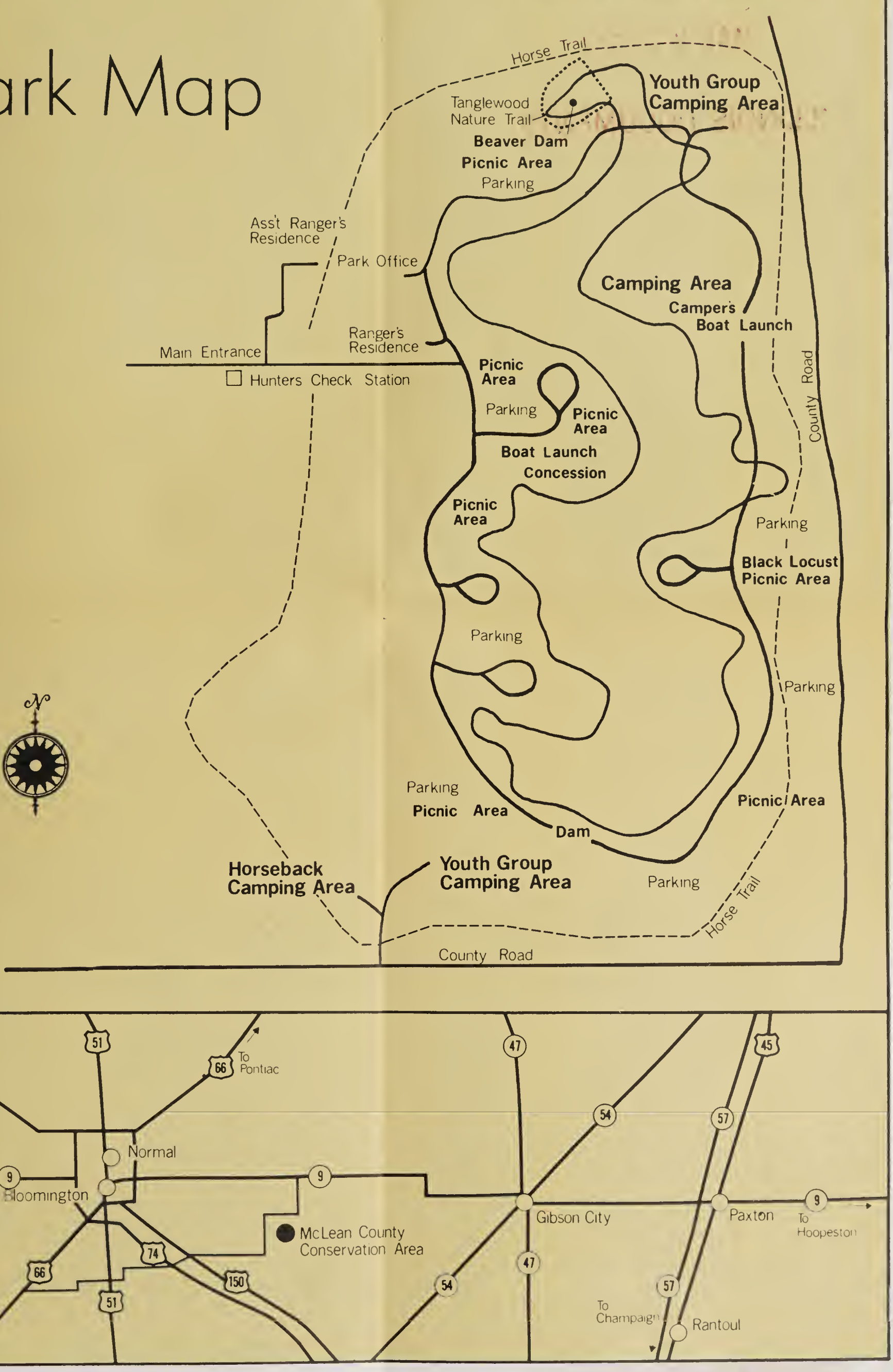
Admittance will not be granted groups of 25 or more persons to any state park or conservation area unless permission from the park ranger has been secured to use the facilities. It is also required that groups of minors have adequate supervision and that at least one responsible adult accompany each group not exceeding 15 minors. All pets must be on a leash.

Numerous State Parks and Memorials are within easy access of every part of the state. Lodges, cabins and dining rooms are important features of Illinois Beach, Starved Rock, Pere Marquette, White Pines Forest and Giant City. Reservations for lodging should be made with lodge managers.

All state parks are open the year round. When weather conditions necessitate the closing of park roads during freezing and thawing periods, access to park facilities is by foot only.

For further information concerning Illinois State Parks and Memorials write to the Department of Conservation, Division of Education, State Office Building, Springfield, 62706.

Park Map


Horse Trail
Youth Group Camping Area
Tanglewood Nature Trail
Beaver Dam Picnic Area
Parking
Ass't Ranger's Residence
Park Office
Camping Area
Camper's Boat Launch
Ranger's Residence
Main Entrance
Hunters Check Station
Picnic Area
Parking
Picnic Area
Boat Launch Concession
County Road
Picnic Area
Parking
Black Locust Picnic Area
Parking
Parking
Picnic Area
Parking
Picnic Area
Dam
Horseback Camping Area
Youth Group Camping Area
Parking
Horse Trail
County Road
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To Pontiac
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Normal
Bloomington
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McLean County Conservation Area
Gibson City
Paxton
To Hoopeston
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To Champaign
Rantoul
To Lincoln

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